

## Wendy Efird of the Rotary Planetarium Witnesses Space Launch



Earth to Astronaut Wendy...we need you back at the Planetarium!

In a release from the Rotary Planetarium and Science Center in Wadesboro: What better way to spend a vacation away from school than to be invited as a VIP guest to the launch of the Mars Science Laboratory? That is exactly what Wendy Efird, Rotary Planetarium and Science Director, did during the week of

Thanksgiving. Wendy was invited as a guest of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California to attend mission briefings at the Kennedy Space Center prior to the launch as well as the launch itself in Florida.

Wendy was a product of the Space Age and grew up watching John Glenn, the Apollo missions, the first walk on the moon from her black and white television, and the tragedies of the Space Shuttle disasters, witnessed by her roomful of science students during the 1980's.

The excitement of the invitation to attend a launch and be a VIP guest was just phenomenal. During the week, briefings were held for invited guests to learn about what would occur during the launch as well as an informative session about the laboratory that was six years in the making.

The day of the launch consisted of a 3 a.m. wake-up time and a 5 a.m. bus trip to the Space Center. Wendy was on the first bus out of the meeting place for guests at the Space Coast Station, spring training home of the Washington Nationals. On the bus were many of the people involved in the actual construction of the Mars Science Laboratory which was being launched. They were equally excited to see their work of six years finally come to fruition.

Even though the launch was scheduled for after 10 a.m., security requirements shut the Space Center down, restricted



water and air access two hours before liftoff. The launch viewing site was approximately 4 miles away from the pad, but was the closest viewing site allowed. The excitement of watching the launch clock tick down, second by second, brought back sweet memories of the many moon missions and landings that she had seen throughout her lifetime. It was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Due to the generosity of the Wadesboro Rotary Club and the Rotary Foundation, Wendy's expenses for the trip were funded.

The launch of the Mars Science Laboratory (MSL) took place on Saturday, November 26 from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, which is adjacent to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. It is an unmanned mission via an Atlas V rocket that held a car-sized rover named Curiosity. MSL was a joint adventure of JPL, American scientists from various laboratories across the United States, Canadian, Spanish, Russian and German scientists as well as the Kennedy Space Center. The planned arrival will be August 2012, with a precise guided entry and powered sky crane descent employed to place Curiosity on the Martian surface. Curiosity will be able to roll over obstacles 25 inches high, and can travel 660 feet per day. It has six wheel drive, a rocker-boogie suspension system, and cameras mounted on a mast to help the team on Earth select targets and driving routes.

Mars also has two other rovers that were launched in 2003, however Curiosity is much more advanced with high tech computer and analysis equipment. MSL's power generator produces electricity from the heat of plutonium. During the launch, spectators were advised of the risk of exposure to nuclear materials in case of problems during liftoff. Radiation meters were scattered around the area to monitor any type of abnormal radiation readings.

During the twenty-three months (one Mars year) after landing, Curiosity will analyze samples drilled from rocks or scooped from the ground as it explores, assesses and characterizes its landing site region. Much like a robotic field geologist and mobile geochemical and environmental laboratory, its assignment will be to investigate whether conditions have been favorable for microbial life and for preserving clues in the rocks about possible past life. Curiosity will provide us with new data for understanding Mars as a potential habitat for life, past and present. Wendy will anxiously await on August 2012, but seriously doubts Curiosity will find any green aliens on the Martian surface!

## Legislative Update

From Rep. Frank McGuirt: The General Assembly returned to Raleigh again this week (December 5th) for a three-day session that produced very few results. The session began at 8 pm Sunday night, I know because I was there. The Senate left shortly after midnight Tuesday and the House finished its business that afternoon. In between, the Senate voted to repeal the Racial Justice Act, a measure the governor is now considering for veto. The House approved a cap on the gas tax, for which I voted. The cap was passed after the Senate had adjourned, so they were not able to approve the change. A measure that would have provided counties some flexibility in managing their health and human services agencies failed to pass a procedural vote.

The session would have allowed the consideration of a new gaming deal with the Cherokee Nation in western North Carolina. The 30-page consideration approved by the governor and tribal leaders was not complete in time for us to fully review and consider it before adjournment.

Since adjourning regular session, legislators have been called into special sessions for nearly four work weeks. Each day of session costs the state an estimated \$50,000, so we have already reached nearly \$1 million just in administrative costs for these largely unproductive special sessions and additional sessions have already been scheduled for February and April. It is a disgrace and a disservice to the taxpayers of North Carolina that the House majority continues to waste their tax dollars.

Nearly three dozen laws that passed earlier this year went into place on December 1st.

- A new law requires repeat DWI offenders to receive minimum prison sentences of 1-3 years and fines of up to \$10,000 in some cases. The court could require electronic alcohol monitoring of some offenders. "Laura's Law" is named after 17-year-old Laura Fortenberry of Gaston County. She died last year in an accident involving a driver with several DWI convictions. (S.L. 2011-191)
- Cars driven by a suspect charged with a felony for a police chase can now be seized by your sheriff. The vehicle can be sold if the suspect is convicted of the felony, with

the proceeds going to the schools. (S.L. 2011-271)

- It is now illegal to dismember a body to hide a crime or evidence of an unnatural death. The law followed the death of Zahra Baker, a 10-year-old girl from Hickory who was dismembered. Her stepmother, Elisa Baker, pleaded guilty in September to second-degree murder and was sentenced to prison. (S.L. 2011-193)
- Criminal investigators must now turn over any evidence in all felony cases. The law is intended to help defense attorneys get material from law enforcement and crime labs sooner than they might otherwise. (S.L. 2011-19)
- Juveniles convicted of nonviolent felonies can now have their records cleared if they stay out of trouble until they are adults. The law applies only to first-time offenders and has a number of requirements and exceptions. Two state law enforcement commissions would still have access to the expunctions. (S.L. 2011-278)

Other changes include:

- Fuller reporting of previous names and name changes by people who must file in the state as sex offenders
- Tougher penalties for people who intimidate or interfere with witnesses.
- Allowing probation officers to carry concealed weapons without a permit.

For a full list of new laws, visit [www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net). Under the heading on the left titled "News and Information," click on the item titled "2011 Legislation with Effective Dates."

Please contact me if I can be of any assistance, and I wish you and your family a very Happy New Year.

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